

St. Louis Flew False Colors at Advertising Convention

City's Advertising and Business Practices Belie "Truth" Emblem

Despite Agreement, Hotels Heavily Overcharge Convention Guests—Stores Fail to Take Kindly to Adams's Offer of Marked Down Money for Marked Down Goods—Better Business Bureau Helps Newspapers Keep Out Fake Financial Ads—Medical Ads Flourish

By SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

St. Louis, Mo., June 5.—For one week in June St. Louis flourished the Truth in Advertising emblem. The newspapers displayed it liberally. The stores were full of it. It was flaunted on signs, banners and badges everywhere. As a welcome to the convention of the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World it was a graceful tribute. As a sign-manual for St. Louis itself, it was false colors. St. Louis has a long way to go before it can qualify in any general sense as a practitioner of truth in advertising.

For one thing, it must first reform all its newspapers. They are bad—though by no means down to the level of Atlanta, Los Angeles or San Francisco, but below the average of Cleveland, Kansas City or Minneapolis. For another, it must clean up about half of its large advertisers among the shops, which fairly run riot with ridiculous value claims, besides occasionally passing counterfeit goods on the public in the shape of seconds and damaged merchandise. For a third, it should get solidly behind the newly organized Better Business Bureau of the St. Louis Advertising Club, which, under the leadership of Griffin McCarthy (since enlisted for service in France), the manager, has already done effective work, but needs the equipment and the authority to do a great deal more. Incidentally, it might look to its hotels.

By strangers a city is judged, to no small extent, on the basis of the treatment received at the hands of its hotels. In this respect St. Louis is unfortunate. It gave the A. A. C. W. an example of what, in a store, I should term fake advertising, since it failed signally to live up to its representations. One of the stipulations put forth by the St. Louis Advertising Club at the 1916 convention of the A. A. C. W., when it was seeking the 1917 convention, was that hotel rates would not be raised above the normal; and the club claims to have in its possession now an agreement to this effect, signed by the leading hotels. Whether or not all the signatories to this undertaking violated it, I am not prepared to state, but this I can say, that I heard complaints against practically every leading hotel in the city on the ground of overcharging.

As an example, take the Hotel Jefferson, the official headquarters of the convention. Ordinarily one can get a good, comfortable room, with bath, there for \$3. A friend of mine, an A. A. C. W. member, thinking it wise to be forehanded, engaged a room with bath several weeks in advance. When he arrived and asked the price he was blandly informed that it would be \$8 a day for one person. He took in a late-comer friend, who was roomless, and the charge was \$10 a day. At the same time ordinary patrons not handicapped by membership in the A. A. C. W. could get a good room with bath at \$3 apiece, two in a room. Some of the New York contingent (who considered, by the way, that they were "getting off light") paid \$3 each for half a small single room and the use of a bath apportioned among four persons. I hardly think that the Jefferson will claim this to be its normal rate.

From Minneapolis comes a complaint that the Jefferson charged \$6 per day for a type of room insufficiently furnished for two people, and that one of the two occupants who extended his stay after the convention had to pay only \$2.50 for this same room occupied alone. This seems unimpeachable proof that the Jefferson raised rates in direct contravention of its agreement. The complainant, himself a former vigilance committee chairman, writes: "It would certainly be worth while for the hotel men to know that they could not hold up advertising men without getting some unfavorable notice from some quarter."

The Planters' Hotel is under the same management as the Jefferson. It followed the same principle of "all the traffic will bear." The San Francisco Club (which, by the way, undertakes to assure the A. A. C. W. that no hotel overcharges will be permitted in the 1918 convention) was obliged to pay \$9 per day for room and bath, with three people to a room, and \$7 per day for two people to a room. One San Franciscan, who occupied a room without bath, alone, had to pay \$7 per day. According to guests familiar with the hotel, the regular charge for this room would be \$2.50 per day. Members of the Cleveland Club complain that they had to pay \$6 per day for two persons for inferior rooms on the inner court, and that those who left early and received a rebate for the re-rental of the rooms got back a credit of \$2.50 per day on rooms for which they were paying \$6. In defiance of the hotels it is alleged that the agreements specified that normal rates were to be maintained, but on a basis of two people to a room; that is, a \$3 room would be \$6 whether one or two persons occupied it. But the cases I have cited above certainly do not come within the scope of this arrangement. It does not justify charging \$8 per room for one person and raising it to \$10 for two persons; nor rebating on a basis of less than half what was charged against the convention guests. In my recent country-wide trip I have stayed at the best hotels everywhere, and nowhere have I paid such rates as those imposed upon the A. A. C. W. guests at St. Louis. Sooner or later some one (perhaps myself, perhaps some other) is going to take up this whole matter of convention-bilking by the hotels and restaurants of the country and stir up the hotel business, considerably to its immediate discomfort and ultimate good. Meantime, in the eyes of a large body of men who have a wide influence upon public opinion, St. Louis stands convicted, through its hotels, of sharp practice upon its guests.

In the local store-world there is a wide variance of standards and principles. Some of the shops which most conspicuously displayed the Truth emblem in A. A. C. W. week are the very ones which most blatantly violate its principle in their advertising. Local merchants still believe—with a few exceptions—that you must "bait" the public with all sorts of value and "special" offers, in order to interest them. So they load their advertising with such terms as "value," "worth," "marked down from," "heretofore," "previously sold at," and the like, to give it weight, much as cer-

tain cheap silks are "loaded" with metal. And thereby hangs a tale, which may recall memories to certain local salespeople.

Mercantile St. Louis doubtless preserves as one of its traditions of A. A. C. W. convention week the visits of a stranger, probably mad, though possibly a practical joker, who went about the stores making absurd applications of the "special sale" principle and trying to buy marked down merchandise for marked down money. That mysterious stranger (with certain reservations) was myself. I did not actually essay to pass Confederate money, which process might conceivably have landed me in jail. I merely treated myself to an hour's amusement at the expense of the local "value" advertisers in pursuance of an experiment which I had been waiting to try out on some city where I am quite unknown and in no danger of having my harmless little ruse betrayed.

The Famous & Barr Company is one of the local department stores of high standing, which, nevertheless, sings the siren song of values to its public with great regularity. Having selected an advertisement of \$1.50 shirts for \$1.15, I approached the particular siren having these fairy gifts in charge and asked:

"Are these actually \$1.50 values?"

"They are," said he. "Specially marked down. There's the \$1.50 mark. You can see for yourself."

"You guarantee them to be worth that?"

"Positively."

"Suppose I take four and offer to pay for them with this?" I asked.

"What is it?" queried the clerk, viewing with suspicion the bill which I had brought along for the occasion.

"It's a ten-dollar bill issued by the Confederate States of America."

"And you're trying to pass that on me?"

"Not at all. I'm merely asking what you would reply if I offered to give you this bill for the four shirts."

"I'd turn it down."

"Why?"

"The young man began to splutter. "Why? Why? Because it's phony, that's why. It ain't worth ten dollars."

"It was worth ten dollars."

"But—"

"There's the \$10 mark. You can see for yourself. I'll take six dollars for it."

The young man looked at his marked down shirt and then at my marked down bill, and then assumed the expression of one suddenly detached from the firm ground of dogma and cast into a sea of doubt and darkness.

"You don't believe this shirt is worth \$1.50?" was his troubled observation when he came to the surface to breathe.

"I've no doubt that it once was."

"But look at the mark," he persisted, pointing to the garment.

"Look at mine," I returned, pointing to my bill.

"That bill ain't worth anything, and you know it," he protested.

"It isn't worth as much as it once was," I admitted. "Neither is that shirt."

"Why ain't it?"

"Because you're offering it for \$1.15, and if it were worth \$1.50 the store wouldn't be selling it for less."

"Say, you better talk to the advertising manager," he said. "Excuse me."

I excused him. And while he was seeking aid (or possibly the police) I passed on to the highly reputable store of Scruggs, Vandervoort & Barney, who had my hopes a-dancing by piping this tune in the morning's papers: "\$4, \$5 and \$6.00 neckwear, \$2.00, \$2.50 and \$3.00."

"I'd like to see a \$6.00 tie, please," said I.

A sprightly young clerk laid out a small array of neckwear which might have been \$6.00 ties in St. Louis, though I wouldn't have paid that price for any one of them in New York.

"These are \$6.00 values?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

"How much is this one?"

"Three dollars."

"Three dollars for a tie worth twice as much. How do you do it?"

"It's a special sale."

"And this tie is actually worth six dollars?"

"Oh, yes. Positively."

"That is, you're practically giving me \$3."

"Well, ye-es."

"And you make the same kind of offers in other departments?"

"We give very good bargains in all our departments."

"Then perhaps you can tell me where I can buy a five-dollar gold piece for \$2."

She couldn't. At least she didn't. She retired from view, around a corner, presumably for consultation, for I presently heard a murmur of voices, from which the words "nut" and "dippy" fell pleasantly upon my retiring ear. At Nugent's, where they were selling "sweaters made to sell for \$6, \$8 and \$10 at \$4.00," I had no luck with my Confederate bill, though I carefully explained that it had been made to buy for \$10. At Kline's they wouldn't consider it at any price, notwithstanding that they were advertising suits formerly up to \$40.00 at \$13.95, and I offered to prove that four of my depreciated greenbacks were "formerly up to \$40," but could now be had for that same price of \$13.95. Garland's, clinging determinedly to their values of \$35.00 on goods priced at \$38.95, would have none of my values. Nowhere in St. Louis was I able to find a store which would apply to my disdained relic of a lost cause, the same principle which it maintained in its own advertising. Nor at any of the shops where money was positively given away in the form of "valued" goods at heavy discounts could I purchase a \$5 gold piece at half price or even a dollar bill for 99 cents. So much greater respect hath St. Louis for its money than for its merchandise!

In one large store, however, I could have found no basis for my innocent diversions. Stix, Baer & Fuller (The Grand Leader) kept clear of all value claims, comparative prices and similar makeshifts. They embarked upon this venture last November, chiefly through the influence of Sidney Baer, of the firm, and Louis Blumenstock, the advertising manager. Doubting Thomases

in the trade insisted that the public wasn't ready for any such move; that it ought to be done gradually, if at all, until people could be educated up to it. The answer of The Grand Leader was to announce the new policy and put it in practice over night.

Now this must be admitted in any fair consideration of advertising policy: that it requires more skill, ingenuity and effort—in short, more brains—to advertise without value and comparative price claims than with them. It's so easy to be imaginative with figures! The Grand Leader people were willing to make the severest test, and they had the brains. Also they had the goods, another essential requisite. From the start the new policy was successful. It built business, a steady, sound increase.

"Wait till the time comes for the special sales," said the critics. "Then they'll fall down."

The time came for the half-yearly sale; and not a value or comparative price, a "formerly" or "heretofore" or "made to sell at" was quoted. Notwithstanding which the sale showed a 35 per cent increase over that of the previous year. In the anniversary sale not even an item was stated. The advertising manager simply went into print and talked to his public about the policies, standards and advantages of the establishment. And it pulled. The average increase of business under the new policy is upward of 17 per cent. That a department store in a city as thoroughly committed to the old way in advertising as St. Louis could make an instant and convincing success of the new method is the strongest and most specific evidence for non-comparative advertising that I have yet met with.

An interesting experiment along the same lines, though not so complete and radical, is being carried on by the B. Nugent & Brothers' Drygoods Company, whose booklet of advertising rules is worth careful study by any one interested in this subject. If anything could throw adequate safeguards about comparative price claims, these Nugent rules would do it. But the firm candidly admits that the very insistence on rigid accuracy in its practice tends to the gradual elimination of the comparative method. To begin with, Nugent's does business on the solid foundation of "absolute satisfaction or your money back." In the foreword to their booklet is this notice to their employees and the public:

"We do not consider it good advertising merely to avoid lies, but we want in addition to include everything essential to a complete and accurate picture of the merchandise advertised."

"Value," "worth" and "special" are tabooed terms. Employees are warned against the use of superlatives. When seconds or imperfect goods are offered, the word "Seconds" must appear in the headline, and the goods be designated with a yellow ticket, a combination which insures proper notification to the public. "Trade" names, where any incorrect meaning is implied, are not permitted. Furs appear under their own name. That composition which in many places is labelled "French" Ivory Nugent's sells as "artificial" ivory—which it is. Even the term "all wool" is forbidden. The goods (at Nugent's) are either plain "wool" or a combination, such as "wool and cotton," and are so described. There is a standing bonus of \$1 offered to any customer or employee pointing out an untruthful or misleading statement in any advertisement or sign. Comparative prices are permitted under certain restrictions, but (though it is not so specified in the booklet) any department which violates these restrictions or wanders from the actual facts is penalized by having the privilege of employing comparative prices at all withdrawn for a certain period. This operates not only as a brake, but also to instruct the department heads in the more rigid school of non-comparative advertising. From all that I could gather, it would seem to be only a question of time when the Nugent store will confine itself to the strict policy of advertising "goods as they are, not as they were."

Of the other large and high class shops, Scruggs, Vandervoort & Barney do not use open "value" claims, but do employ comparative prices, though in a diminishing degree. The Famous & Barr Company use both value claims and comparative prices; but "edit" these representations through a system of their own. They have one employee, an expert, whose sole duty is to check up every item in each day's advertising by comparison with the goods offered and report any errors or misrepresentations. All of these four shops cooperate heartily with the Better Business Bureau of the St. Louis Advertising Club.

Schaper delivered himself of this philosophical observation:

"The only reason I advertise is to get folks into my store. The kind of people I sell to don't believe what they read in ads anyway. So there's nothing dishonest in my advertising."

Which, as an expression of the puller-in theory of advertising, covers the ground. However, Mr. Schaper altered his views after the Better Business Bureau had found in his establishment an instrument advertised as a \$300 Piano Player, 88 notes, on sale at \$99. The 88 notes were there. They responded tonefully to a finger stroke. But when the automatic device was trained upon them about one-third of their number promptly qualified for a Trappist monastery, with its rule of eternal silence. The salesman said that about \$10 expended in repairs would restore the lost voices. But the Bureau's expert figured that it would cost about \$75, and failed to see wherein Mr. Schaper (otherwise than on his puller-in theory) could justify the \$300 representation. After a conference Mr. Schaper admitted that his theory of advertising might be fallacious and promised to adopt other standards.

The Better Business Bureau has not been going long, but it has made itself strongly influential already in mercantile circles, chiefly from the fact that its manager, Mr. Griffin McCarthy, has shown himself ready to go after the biggest as well as the smallest fish in local waters, with whole-souled impartiality. To this, Mermol, Jaccard & King, probably the largest retail jewelry stores west of the Mississippi, and certainly one of the highest class concerns in the country, can testify. A "cleaning-out sale" was advertised in this store, and signs were scattered about announcing:

"Every article in every department is included in this sale. All silver sold at a discount of 15 per cent."

Complaint came to the Bureau that Mermol, Jaccard & King were not living up to the terms of their advertisement in the matter of "Community silver." A prospective purchaser attempted to purchase some of this ware at a 15 per cent discount and was met with a bluff. Despite the citation of the advertisement to sell this brand at the specified reduction, Manager McCarthy went direct to Mr. Goodman King, senior manager of the firm, and stated the case. Presumably Mr. King wasn't as well informed about his own stock as a man in his position should have been, for he blandly admitted that he had had some of the Community silver, and he had therefore ordered it removed from the floor.

"The special reduction applies only to merchandise shown on the floor," he explained.

"Exactly," said the Bureau manager, who had not come without preparation for argument, "and if you will step down to the floor and point out a number of chests of Community silver there."

He did so. Mr. King, thus enlightened as to the conduct of his business, ordered this line removed and announcement made in the advertisement that trade-marked goods were excepted from the special reduction.

A profound lack of interest in the purpose, practice and principle of the advertisement, the largest cash store in the city, until Mr. McCarthy began to visit it with items of complaint in his pocket. Bathroom fixtures were the subject of one of these. They were represented to be white enamel on brass. So they were, some of them. Others which had been carefully mixed in with them were white enamel on tin. When this was pointed out to the store authorities they were less annoyed than bored, but graciously promised to put the tinware on a separate counter. Boredom gave place to resentment in the face of the advertisement of "Fine Quality Mercantile Sun-Fast Reps," in which one important point was omitted, to wit, that the goods were damaged. Manager McCarthy sent around after a complaint book, in which he is not only twelve-year-old piece, in which there were three marked blemishes. This was reported, and the buyer of the department was called in. He made a tactful mistake. He said that the goods were not damaged, but that they were put there after the goods had left the store. Now, Mr. McCarthy is a mild enough young man in the ordinary intercourse of life, but he is not a ready course of bluff, and he was not a resourceful buyer by asking whether he was ready to make that statement in court, against the evidence of experts in the line of weaving. The buyer blinked, stammered and guessed that he might have been mistaken. Mr. McCarthy left the store with a few wholesome remarks on the inadvisability of selling seconds unmarked. His third experience with Lindell's was in the matter of handkerchiefs, a sale of 10 cent and 12 1/2 cent (claimed) handkerchiefs marked down. Bureau purchasers matched them in neighboring stores at 5 and 6 cents. Mr. McCarthy again visited Lindell's and invited them to explain. They couldn't explain, though, to do them justice, they tried. One point they made clear: that they were always glad to hear of any complaint through the Bureau. So, perhaps there is hope for them yet, though they signaled the opening of the A. A. C. W. convention by exhibiting a big "Truth" emblem above a composite advertisement in which just eight items out of one hundred and twenty were offered for what they were actually worth. All the others were value claims, or implications, of varying degrees of absurdity.

Before accepting the management of the Better Business Bureau Mr. McCarthy had had considerable banking experience, and his work of educating the public against misrepresentation has been along financial lines quite as much as commercial. On this side he gained the confidence of the newspapers to such an extent that they are always ready to listen to him and frequently to be guided by his advice in the matter of financial advertising. He pays particular heed to the classified columns, wherein so many traps are set for the dollars of the poor. In one notable instance he was able to shut off a bad advertiser and doubtless save thousands of dollars to St. Louis investors. A local "Get-Rich-Quick" practitioner named Hurst had for several years been peddling about the stock of his Automatic Switch and Signal Company, incorporated in Wyoming for \$100,000. Poor people and hopeful dependents with a little capital were his patrons. In one case he got hold of a poor widow, just after her husband died, and persuaded her to invest her little fortune of \$3,000. He operated mostly by the personal touch, but occasionally employed classified advertising, and thus came under Manager McCarthy's eye. Encouraged by the results of advertising, Hurst decided to branch out a little, and selected The Post-Dispatch for a more splurging kind of exploit. The "copy" was highly set off, but The Post-Dispatch, which has developed a hopeful professional conscience lately on financial matters, didn't like the look of it in proof, and sent it around to the Better Business Bureau. The advertisement predicted millions in earnings for the stockholders, and stated that Hurst's system had been "indorsed by the lead-

Continued on page thirteen

HEARN

Fourteenth Street West of Fifth Avenue

Now---Our 25TH AUGUST SALE

Blankets Quilts—Comfortables Tickings—Pillows Silverware Cutlery Soaps Muslins Sheetings—Sheets Pillow Cases Curtains and Draperies Linens Towels—Towelings Scarfs—Shams Rugs—Shades Flannels

The Most Difficult and the Most Successful Sale That We Ever Have Had DIFFICULT—Cottons and Woolens are higher than ever before—indeed, they are difficult to obtain at any price—it means much even to have the goods.

It means more to have the goods at these sale prices.

SUCCESSFUL—Because nowhere else in town are such values to be duplicated.

THE FOLLOWING FOR BOTH MONDAY AND TUESDAY:

No Mail or Telephone Orders on August Sale Specials

Muslins, Sheets, Pillow Cases

"The Indispensables" of the Household

At Our Unusual Cut Prices For August Sale

Our Reg. 75 O'cedar Oil or Dust Mops... \$1.00

O'cedar Oil—For use with mop or as furniture polish—

25 ct. 4-oz. bottle... \$1.00

50 ct. 12-oz. bottle... \$1.00

\$1.00 1-qt. can... \$1.00

75 ct. Sherwood's Dish Drainers... \$1.00

Sanitary and labor saving

\$1.50 Mrs. Potts' Sad Irons... \$1.00

Nickel plated—3 in set

22 ct. Table Oil Cloth... \$1.00

1 1/4 yds. wide—desirable patterns—slight imperfections.

19 and 14 ct. Shelf Oil Cloth... \$1.00

15 and 18 inches wide—slight imperfections.

Shelf Oil Cloth... \$1.00

6 inches wide—for edging or borders—12-yd. piece.

45 ct. Victor Water Color Opaque Shades... \$1.00

Mounted on good spring rollers, complete with fixtures—all colors—size 7x3 ft.

25th August Sale Silverware and Cutlery

Tablespoons and Forks

Our reg. 22 ea.—Rogers W. R. grade—silver plated—latest designs—12-yd. piece... \$1.00

Teaspoons

Our reg. 11 ea.—To match above... \$1.00

Dinner Knives

Our reg. 24 ea.—Silver plated on fine tempered steel... \$1.00

Soup Ladles

Our reg. 14 ea.—Rogers W. R. grade; silver plated; new patterns—12-yd. piece... \$1.00

Tablespoons and Forks

Our reg. 16 ea. (half doz.)—Rogers 1881; in plain or fancy designs... \$1.00

Odd Pieces of Silverware

Our reg. 22 ea.—Sugar Spoon, Butter Knife, Tablespoon and Forks... \$1.00

Table Knives and Forks

Our reg. 19 ea. (set of 6 ea.)—Hand-forged steel; bone and ebony handles... \$1.00

Carver and Fork

Our reg. 14 ea. (per pair)—G. Wostenholme's fine Sheffield steel; stag handles... \$1.00

Bread and Meat Knives

Fine steel—reliable make... \$1.00

Shears

Our reg. 58—Hand-forged steel—nickel finish... \$1.00

Opportunities Unusual In Leather Goods

Envelope Bags

Double flap—inside frame. Special, 37

Our Reg. 50

Clearance of Hand Bags

Slightly rubbed—Special, 1.00

Our Reg. 1.85

Cowhide Travel Bags

Sewed on reinforced corners—rivet frame—Keritrol lining—lock catches—Special, 4.00

Our Reg. 4.95

Travel Bags

Black and brown—reinforced ends—14 to 18 inches—Special, 3.24

Our Reg. 4.00

Japanese Matting Suitcases

Reinforced ends—bound edges—fancy lining—full length pockets—24 in. Special, 1.85

Japanese Matting Suitcases

Cowhide straps all round—reinforced corners—large and roomy—25 in. Special, 2.94

COOLEST STORE IN TOWN

300 Electric Fans Make It So

See Sunday American, World, Times for Twenty Morning Specials on Sale Monday and Tuesday Until 1 P. M.